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Józef Chałasiński's Research on the Nationalization Process of Peasants in Poland

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Abstract

This article describes the research on the nationalization of peasantry in Poland by the Polish sociologist Józef Chałasiński (1904–1979). He realized that the ethnicity and nation in Poland were formed with the exclusion of peasants marginalized by privileged classes. The idea of a nation was used to ensure class domination over peasants; their inclusion in the nation was tantamount to the abandonment of the peasant culture and rural lifestyle. Chałasiński described the emergence of a modern Polish nation through the popularization of the elite culture, which led to the gradual disappearance of the peasant class in Poland.

Keywords: Józef Chałasiński; peasants in Poland; modern nations; theories of nation; Central Europe; national identity; nation-building

Introduction

One of the most famous Polish sociologists, Józef Chałasiński (1904–1979) was the author of over 700 scientific, popular science, and journalistic publications. His *Młode pokolenie chłopów* (“The Younger Generation of Peasants”) came out in the 1930s and had a significant impact on Polish sociology in its golden age, that is, in the interwar period (1919–1939), serving as an important point of reference for many scholars in the following decades. Readers familiar with his writings can notice that a significant part of his output concerned, either explicitly or implicitly, the formation and development of the nation as a modern social construct, of which peasants were an integral part. This article seeks to analyze Chałasiński's concept for the formation of the Polish nation in terms of the peasant class and its nationalization process. First, it discusses the works dedicated to national issues, which Chałasiński wrote in the changing socio-political context that had a significant effect on the scholar's approach to this topic. Second, the culturalist and historical perspective of Chałasiński's research on the nation is presented. The final sections focus on Chałasiński's explanation for the nationalization process of Polish peasants in terms of the formation of the Polish nation.

Chałasiński's interest in the concept of a nation

Chałasiński's interest in the formation and continuity of nations originated from his family home. It developed as a result of his immersion in the intellectual habitus of the Polish intelligentsia and nobility, educating children in the spirit of patriotism and care for the language and Polish culture, which were threatened with marginalization when Poland was not an independent state (1795–1918).

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As a teenager, Józef became active in the National Youth Organization, an underground organization aimed at fighting the Russian occupation. When the war with Bolshevik Russia broke out (1919–1921), he joined the army at the age of 16 and fought as a volunteer. After returning from the war, he resumed his interrupted education and passed his secondary school leaving exams in 1923. His socialization in an intelligentsia-nobility family no doubt shaped his democratic and pro-state political views and scientific interests (Krauz-Mozer 2015, 258). As a young man, he became interested in why a significant number of Polish peasants did not exhibit strong inclinations for being Polish and Polishness. He was surprised to notice that a portion of the Polish nobility and intelligentsia did not recognize Polish peasants as legitimate members of the Polish nation.

Chałasiński entered adulthood in a country that had regained independence after 123 years of having been partitioned by Prussia, Austria, and Russia. The reborn Republic of Poland was a multinational state. A census conducted in 1921 revealed that, ethnically, 69% of the country's citizens were Poles, 15% were Ukrainians, 8% were Jews, 4% were Belarusians, and 3% were Germans. In some regions of the country, Poles were a minority (Tomaszewski 1991, 22–23). Significant portions of the country's citizenry felt no connection with Polishness (for example, the German and Ukrainian minorities), and intra-national conflicts became a permanent feature of the political landscape of the reborn state (Borodziej, Górny 2018, 394–412). The urban areas were severely damaged by civil clashes, and about 1 million people lost their lives (Chwalba 2014, 619–628). Despite the fact that Poland was still a peripheral country with an archaic post-feudal economy, the Polish state managed to recover by degrees until the outbreak of World War II in 1939 (Gołota 2018, 197). It is worth remembering that soon after the end of the First World War, rural peasants accounted for 60% to 75% of Poland's citizens, depending on the region (Porter-Szűcs 2021, 190–198).

Observing the reality of Poland at that time, Chałasiński realized that the state, and nation, required swift and deep reforms. He decided to take up studies, and, after completing them, helped champion these restructurings (Nowakowski 1983, 392). Chałasiński pursued his interests and enrolled in the faculty of sociology, where he studied under Florian Znaniecki, who saw the study of the formation of nations as a fundamental issue (Markiewicz 2009, 217). Znaniecki became his mentor, guided his studies, and had an enormous influence on Chałasiński's ideas (Markley-Znaniecka 1983, 365). It was then that Chałasiński read Robert Park and William I. Thomas, became interested in the psychology of William McDougall, and explored the concepts of John Dewey (Krauz-Mozer 2015, 259). He took in the works of Ludwik Krzywicki, one of the architects of Polish sociology, and also those of Ludwik Gumplowicz, especially his analyses of national antagonisms (Markley-Znaniecka 1983, 371). While still engaged in his studies, he met Jan Stanisław Bystron, an ethnographer working at the University of Poznań who was already a recognized researcher in the culture of Polish peasants. Also, during that period, he met Teodor Abel, a fellow student of Znaniecki then, and later an American scholar focusing on the issues of Nazism (Krauz-Mozer 2015, 259).

In 1927 he defended his doctorate and began lecturing in sociology at the University of Poznań, becoming Znaniecki's deputy. From that year on, the *sociology of nation* was taught as a separate course (Kraško 2011, 24). Chałasiński observed with concern the political situation in the country, and he assessed negatively the military coup carried out in May 1926 by Marshal Józef Piłsudski, one of those who crafted Poland's independence, and its first leader. He was also unsettled by the growth of nationalist sentiments, which were particularly noticeable in Poznań, where the nationalist party National Democracy was strong and stood in opposition to Piłsudski's camp. Both the authoritarianism of the military and the burgeoning nationalism were at odds with his faction's liberal-democratic political views (Gryko 1984, 112).

In 1931, at the age of only 27, he received his habilitation. His first book *Drogi awansu społecznego robotnika* ("The Ways of a Worker's Social Advancement"), published in the same year, focused on the formation of national consciousness among Polish workers, a significant number of whom were peasants migrating to cities in search of work in industry (Kłoskowska 1984,

14). In it, he referred to the functionalism of Bronisław Malinowski (whose works he translated into Polish). Between 1931–1933, as part of his Rockefeller Scholarship, Chałasiński conducted research on Polish economic immigrants, mainly peasants, in England and the United States. Initially, he spent several weeks in London with Bronisław Malinowski. Afterward, in the USA, he met Theodore Fred Abel and was there for a year under the scientific supervision of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess at the University of Chicago (Kilias 2017, 27).

Based on his studies, he wrote *Parafia i szkoła parafialna wśród emigracji polskiej w Ameryce* (“Parish and Parochial School among Polish Immigrants in America”) (1935a) and *Szkoła w społeczeństwie amerykańskim* (“The School in American Society”) (1936). While the former concentrates on the formation of national consciousness among Polish immigrants in the USA and its passing on to posterity, the second book addresses the formation of the American nation and its culture. In both books, he tried to introduce into Polish sociology the concept of the social role by referring to the works of Znaniecki, William I. Thomas, and Park (Jagiello 1984, 56). As a scholarship recipient of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, in the autumn of 1934, he launched a field study on behalf of the Polish Institute of Sociology in Poznań, in the village of Murcki in south-western Poland (currently, a district of Katowice). His research resulted in the publication of a monograph entitled *Antagonizm polsko-niemiecki w osadzie fabrycznej “Kopalnia” na Górnym Śląsku* (“Polish-German Antagonism in the Industrial Settlement of “Kopalnia” in Upper Silesia”) (1935b), his first empirical treatment entirely dedicated to national issues, analyzing the formation of national identity among the inhabitants of Upper Silesia, who left their villages to work in coal mines (Winclawski 1989, XIV). The work describes national conflicts among Poles, Germans, and Silesians, as well as the formation of the ethnic identity of the lattermost. Here, he utilized Ludwik Gumplowicz’s concept of national antagonism and also referred to the notion of territorial collectivity developed within the framework of Park and Burgess’s social ecology. The works on “Other” by Georg Simmel were also drawn upon (Poniedziałek 2016, 21).

Despite his considerable scientific activity and recognition in the academic community, Chałasiński was not able to secure permanent employment at the University of Poznań. He decided to move to Warsaw. Despite his young age, he left Poznań as a mature and academically accomplished researcher, having already won a measure of acclaim in his academic field (Winclawski 1989, XV). For a short time, he lectured in sociology at the University of Warsaw, where he became more familiar with Stefan Czarnowski, a sociologist and cultural historian who was a student of Emil Durkheim. In 1935, Chałasiński became director of the National Institute of Rural Culture (in Polish: *Polski Instytut Kultury Wsi*, PIKW) in Warsaw. He took the position on the recommendation of Ludwik Krzywicki, that pioneer of sociology in Poland, and was also supported by the economist and sociologist, and two-time Prime Minister of Poland, Władysław Grabski. Chałasiński frowned upon the political situation in the country, which was ruled by an authoritarian military junta that rigged elections, imprisoned opposition politicians (for example, the peasant activist and former Prime Minister Wincenty Witos), and persecuted national minorities and the peasant population (Winclawski 1989, XXI). However, he took up a government job because he believed that even under such conditions, it was necessary to work for the state, and especially so on behalf of the Polish countryside, which required thorough reforms due to its economic and cultural backwardness (Nowakowski 1983, 392).

He decided to conduct a comprehensive study of the Polish peasantry, particularly regarding their nationalization and integration with the Polish nation (Kwilecki 1988, 245). The Institute, together with the editors of the magazine “Przysposobienie Rolnicze,” announced a competition for which a total of 1554 memoirs were submitted. They were subjected to analysis and published in the *Młode pokolenie chłopów* (“The Younger Generation of Peasants”) series in 1938. While undoubtedly putting a spotlight on the peasant class in general, the material available and the author’s interests prompted Chałasiński to search for reflections and personality transformations in the individuals that represented the peasant class by studying their aspirations and maturation, and the discovery of their connection to the class and the Polish nation (Kłoskowska 1984, 13).

The nationalization processes of peasants became the primary focus of the third part in the series *Spoleczność wiejska a społeczność narodo-państwowa* ("Rural Community and the Nation-State Community)," in particular in Chapter 8: "The countryside and the contemporary transformation of the nation."

By the time World War II broke out in 1939, Chałasiński had written eight books and several dozen articles, translated sociological literature into Polish, and was one of the editors of the "Przegląd Socjologiczny," a leading Polish sociological periodical. He led scientific institutions and organized important scientific events. Despite his young age, Chałasiński, beside Znaniecki and Krzywicki, was already considered a pillar of Polish sociology. Znaniecki and Chałasiński represented humanistic sociology, the most important and popular of the scientific schools in Polish sociology. Krzywicki was a representative of Marxist sociology, much less widespread in Polish science of that period (Winclawski 1989, XIII).

During the war, he lived first in Lviv, and then in Warsaw, where he was involved in the activities of the underground university and the Polish Sociological Institute (Winclawski 1989, XXVI). In the autumn of 1944, he joined the activities of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN), an organization established by Polish communists in the Soviet Union and fully controlled by the Russians, which was to take power in liberated Poland and impose communism there. The instigation of cooperation with the PKWN "... by a scientist known from the pre-war period, and from the first days of the government's activity described by popular propaganda, was interpreted at the time as an unequivocal act of political declaration" (Winclawski 1989, XVIII). Jan Szczepański, Chałasiński's younger colleague and collaborator, wrote in his memoirs that despite the reserve with which he treated the Soviets and Polish communists (not engaging in party activity, etc.), Chałasiński believed that it was his duty to get involved in the processes of the post-war reconstruction of the country. This, in turn, meant that some members of the pre-war academic community began to treat him as an element of the new political order (Szczepański 1984, 122).

For the second time in his life, Chałasiński saw Poland ruined by war. It should be noted that as a result of war operations, population losses numbered up to 5,900,000 citizens, including an estimated 2,900,000 Polish citizens of Jewish ancestry. Both the Germans and the Russians set themselves the goal of eliminating the Polish intelligentsia. It is estimated that 39% of Polish doctors, 33% of teachers, 30% of university lecturers and scientists, 28% of clergy of various denominations, and about 26% of lawyers died during the war (Żarnowski 2019, 67–71). National minorities in Poland practically disappeared. Belarusians and Ukrainians remained in the areas occupied by the Soviet Union (or were relocated there), Germans were displaced, and most Jews were murdered. For the first time in its history, Poland was all but ethnically homogeneous, with ethnic Poles making up about 94% of its post-war population (Davies 2010 [2005], 951).

Chałasiński actively participated in the creation of a new university in Łódź, which was to have a folk focus and serve to recreate the Polish intelligentsia in the spirit of socialism (Szczepański 1984, 122). While working at the University of Łódź, first as a vice-president, then as its president, he entered into a dispute with the university's first president, philosopher Tadeusz Kotarbiński, whom he accused of conservative traditionalism intended to hinder the education of the new, folk intelligentsia (Ważniewski 2019, 179). Chałasiński attempted to bring together certain pre-war traditions. He revived the "Przegląd Socjologiczny," which had been published before the war, trying to continue the intellectual traditions of Znaniecki's sociological school by combining them with the new reality. He began to publish "Myśl Współczesna," a periodical to which he invited the communist activist, philosopher, and sociologist Adam Schaff to contribute (Winclawski 1989, XXXII).

Part of his scientific and journalistic output from 1945 to 1950 was devoted to the analysis of changes observed in the Polish nation and its culture in the new socio-political conditions of communist Poland. He argued that the new authorities, guided by the ideas of class liberation, approached peasants as conservative and potentially reactionary forces. They were forced to adopt the urban and intellectual system of values and abandon their own culture (Kłoskowska 1984, 15).

While cooperating with the communist authorities, Chałasiński was constantly working to rebuild the sociological community in Poland. To their own ends, those authorities used Chałasiński, presenting him as a counterweight to non-communist, “bourgeois” professors; in the 1950s, he became “...an intellectual ornament and an invaluable support of the regime” (Jordan 1955, 99). Wanting to show his intellectual independence, he published a text in the journal “Kuznica” entitled “The Social Importance of University Reform,” in which he condemned attempts to subordinate universities unjustly to state power. He wrote about the need for intellectual freedom, autonomy, and the need to democratize university life. This was met unequivocally with criticism from the state authorities. Adam Schaff vilified him in philosophical journals, accusing him of anti-state activities, while communist students, including the later philosopher and author of “Główne nurty marxizmu,” Leszek Kołakowski, accused him of hostility towards Marxism (Ważniewski 2019, 180).

During the years 1947–56, the communist system in its Stalinist version took hold in Poland. Private property was liquidated, agriculture was collectivized, the Catholic Church was attacked, and representatives of opposition organizations, pre-war officers, Catholic priests, and people returning after emigration were imprisoned. At that time, over a million citizens were placed in camps and prisons. Over 50,000 of them died there (Łabiszewski 2012, 7). The higher education system was also subjected to Stalinization. Stalinist ideologists Jakub Berman and Adam Schaff (with whom Chałasiński had already been in conflict) were tasked with reforming the social sciences so that they would become a faithful reflection of Marxism-Leninism. In 1948, the authorities of communist Poland significantly limited the autonomy of universities and abolished sociology as an academic discipline (Kwaśniewicz 2001, 253). All Polish non-Marxist sociology, including Znaniński’s school of thought, was condemned. Chałasiński himself became the object of brutal criticism and a defamatory media smear campaign (Ważniewski 2019, 180). Representatives of the authorities condemned Chałasiński for criticizing the system, his allegiance to Znaniński’s “bourgeois” sociology, and defending the “reactionary peasant culture.” In 1949, the typescript of his book *Inteligencja i naród* (“The Intelligentsia and the Nation”), with excerpts describing the intellectual origins of the Polish culture in which Polish communists, currently pursuing the essentially anti-peasant policies, largely grew up, was withdrawn from print (Ważniewski 2019, 181).

Seeking an opportunity to be allowed to conduct any scientific activity at all, Chałasiński had to compromise with the communist authorities. During the First Congress of Polish Science (29 June–2 July 1951), he presented a self-criticism declaring that Marxism was the only scientific interpretation of social sciences and the humanities. He reinterpreted *The Younger Generation of Peasants*, categorically distanced himself from Znaniński, made the Marxist “confession of faith” and paid tribute to “(...) the science and work of the “great” Stalin. In other words, he was forced to give up his own identity” (Winclawski 1989, XLVI). Chałasiński in fact became one of the very faces of science policy in Poland, attempting to introduce Stalinist precepts into it (Kilias 2017, 54). However, it is worth emphasizing that Chałasiński was not a Stalinist, although he was considered as such by many sociologists. As a result of his attitude, he could continue his research on changes in the Polish national culture, with the mass entry of Polish peasants within its sphere of influence as his primary interest. He published the results of his research in Volume II of “Przegląd Socjologiczny” of 1952.

Upon the liberalization of the era of Stalinism in Poland, *The Intelligentsia and the Nation* was released, including excerpts about the intellectual origins of the national culture and the anti-peasant policy of the communist state authorities. In 1956, he took part in the 3rd Congress of the International Scientific Association, where his speech was met with a lukewarm reception since Chałasiński criticized the latest sociological concepts (including functional-structuralism), their “Americanization,” and the overuse of quantitative methods in research. In 1958, thanks to a Ford Foundation scholarship, he stayed in the USA at the University of California in Berkeley. Here, he again expressed his aversion to American sociology of that time. The result of his trip was the

publication of his book “American Culture: The Formation of National Culture in the United States of America” (1962). The sociology he represented during his stay was assessed rather unenthusiastically, mainly due to its humanistic perspective and Chałasiński’s own aversion to structural functionalism and quantitative research methods (Kilias 2017, 81).

As early as 1954, Chałasiński criticized the use of the vulgarized method of historical materialism in the humanities, which was considered an “incredibly audacious” statement in party circles. In 1956, he began to work energetically on the reconstruction of Polish sociology after the Stalinist period, he took on leadership of the Department of Sociology at the University of Łódź, and he resumed the publication of the “Sociological Review.” In 1957, in the quarterly “Kultura i Społeczeństwo,” he published the famous paper “Drogi i bezdroża socjalizmu w nauka polskiej” (The Paths and Off-Roads of Socialism in Polish Science), in which he criticized Marxist dogmatism in the social sciences. “Both Chałasiński’s desire to emphasize the identity of Polish sociology as a science originating primarily from Znaniecki’s Poznań school and his criticism of the devastation that occurred in Polish science during the Stalinist period resulted in a sharp reaction from the authorities” (Krauz-Mozer 2015, 264).

In 1959, Chałasiński delivered a paper entitled *Socjologia i socjalna mitologia w powojennej Polsce* (“Sociology and Social Mythology in Post-War Poland”), severely criticizing the dogmatism of the Polish humanities and the attitudes of scholars restrained by the corset of the Stalinist version of Marxism. He repeated the same idea at the ISA congress in 1959 in Milan and Stresa, vehemently criticizing Stalinism and its negative influence on “(...) sociology, discreetly omitting his own participation in it and his own attacks on Znaniecki’s school” (Kilias 2017, 99). The authorities used his lecture as a pretext and issued an administrative decision forbidding Chałasiński access to national research, which, importantly, applied also to his studies of the peasantry (Ważniewski 2019, 183). He was dismissed from his job at the University of Łódź and removed from the authorities of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

In the early 1960s, Chałasiński ceased criticizing the authorities in any way, which enabled him to return to active scientific life, the price for which was complete subordination to the policy of the communist state (Ważniewski 2018, 186). In 1963, he was again admitted to peasant research and was invited to participate in the organization of a competition and the publication of memoirs of rural youth. Their texts and studies were included in nine volumes of the series entitled *Młode pokolenie wsi Polski ludowej* (“The Younger Generation of the People’s Republic of Poland.”) In the preface to Volume III, *W poszukiwaniu drogi* (“In Search of the Way”), he observed that culture and the Polish nation, of which the young people felt the rightful members, emerged as important motives in the self-narratives of the rural youth (Chałasiński 1966b, 5). In Volume I, *Awans pokolenia* (“The Advancement of the Generation”), he noticed that what preoccupied him as a scholar and advocate of the rural population – the nationalization process of the Polish peasants – had essentially been completed (Kłoskowska 1984, 16).

Chałasiński gained approval for his activities, which secured him professional stability and a high position in the academic hierarchy. In 1968, the communist authorities in Poland began an anti-Semitic campaign, as a result of which about 13,000 Polish Jews, including several hundred scholars, were forced to leave Poland. Chałasiński did not condemn the policy. In fact, potentially endorsing anti-Semitic stereotypes, he publicly rebuked Adam Schaff and Zygmunt Bauman (who were forced to leave Poland), whom he accused of attacking him for his criticism of Stalinism in the late 1950s (Kilias 2017, 227). In 1966, at the Congress of Polish Culture, he delivered a paper entitled “The Nationalization of the People’s Masses,” presenting a thesis on the integration of the nation as a fundamental effect of post-war changes (Jakubczyk 1983, 734).

Despite his prolific activity as an author, most of his publications remained largely unnoticed in the sociological community at the time. From the beginning of the 1960s, Chałasiński wrote papers of less and less significance, although he was valued at the time as an author of works devoted to the Polish intelligentsia, the countryside, and the nation. Young sociologists treated him as a classic authority whose works must be read even though they were already considered outdated. Some

academics regarded him with reserve, recalling his approach to the communist authorities (Winclawski 1989, XXXII). The only exception was the book *Kultura i naród* (“Culture and Nation”). Published in 1968, it was a collection of Chałasiński’s post-war books, articles, and studies dedicated to the concept of the nation, written over a period of more than 20 years and edited anew. This monograph met with considerable interest from the sociological community (Gryko 1985, 132). “From this new and impressive documentation of Poland’s recent history, Chałasiński infers the occurrence of the integration [of peasants – J.P.] with the Polish nation as a result of a social revolution in our country. This thesis is the leitmotif of the *Culture and Nation* volume of studies” (Drozdowski 1970: 123). Chałasiński retired in 1974. He died on December 5, 1979.

Towards a sociological theory of nation

Chałasiński was largely influenced by Znaniński, who interested his students in the methodological and theoretical approach he developed (Szacki 1996, 612). Znaniński defined nation as a social group with a common culture, which emerged from the folk as a result of the creative work of cultural leaders striving to integrate the linguistically related communities by referring to common values (Poniedziałek 2018, 220–242). Chałasiński shared this approach; however, his ideas were not an epigonic reflection of his master’s work but rather its creative development (Gryko 1985, 131). This observation also applies to the sociology of nation or, more specifically, research on the nationalization of peasants. Not only did he take from his mentor “(...) the principle of describing the social reality with the so-called ‘humanistic factor’ in mind and his method of using personal documents but, to a large extent, he also assimilated Znaniński’s social views” (Winclawski 1989, X). By today’s classifications, he would be placed on the liberal left, with a clear agrarian-folk inclination (Ważniewski 2019, 179).

Despite these similarities, the differences between the two scholars were considerable. “Znaniński had the temperament of a theorist, while his student was rather fascinated by the social reality and was interested in theory only insofar as it was necessary to describe and understand this reality. While Znaniński was constructing a sociological system, Chałasiński primarily aimed to capture the transformation processes of Polish society, without caring much about whether he found a coherent theory suitable for other purposes” (Szacki 1995, 612). Given his nearly *a priori* atheoretical attitude, is it possible to extract a consistent and valuable theory of the nation from Chałasiński’s writings? I believe it is. In fact, he himself called for one to be developed when he wrote in one of his texts that “(...) the sociology of a nation is a neglected discipline in our country, similar to other countries” (Chałasiński 1966a, 39). He wanted to see an interdisciplinary social science that would seek to comprehensively and multidimensionally explain the phenomenon of the formation, functioning, and transformation of a nation and the integration of the peasant class with it. In his textbook on the sociology of education published in 1948, he wrote: “The concepts of nation, state and class refer to the historical and sociological formations whose coexistence and transformation determine the structure and dynamics of contemporary society” (Chałasiński 1948b, 6). They belong among the most important sociological categories describing social reality.

He was sceptical about naturalism in sociology or, more broadly, the social sciences. He objected to the evolutionary explanation, popular particularly in classical sociology, which saw nation as a stage in the social evolution and a logical consequence of social processes in the transition from traditional to modern societies. Chałasiński did not resort to abstract theorizing and based his explanations of social processes on the analysis of empirical data (Kłoskowska 1984, 17). He agreed with Znaniński that a nation was formed as a result of social processes when people merged into larger cultural groups. What bound such communities together were the values represented by the individuals who played the social roles of cultural leaders (Znaniński 1990 [1952], 61). However, Chałasiński believed this explanation was too general and reductionist because it did not refer to specific social circumstances in which the nation was formed, and it omitted important determinants of this process (Chałasiński 1966a, 40).

Seeking to explain any social phenomenon, including the formation and reproduction of a nation, according to Chałasiński, it was necessary to analyze the mutual relations between the social context (“historical background”), the corresponding social interactions among social subjects (“social relations”) and the cognitive mechanisms enabling socialization (“education”) (Łuczewski 2008, 47–64). Following Znaniński, he argued that a nation could form when individuals, subjected to the process of socialization, internalized the given culture (cultural canon) that contributed to the creation of human bonds. He said that “(...) a nation is a workshop of culture” (Boksański 2012, 53). Referring to Bronisław Malinowski, he believed that its formation was possible when a specific language, traditions, values, and beliefs were shared by a large social group whose members were aware of their specificity and cultural distinctiveness (Drozdowicz 1970, 127). One of the most important elements of the sociology of a nation is to study the process of culturalization. “Culturalisation is about being introduced to and entering the universe of symbolic culture in general, including national culture” (Kłoskowska 2005, 109). The author of *The Younger Generation of Peasants* assumed that “(...) nation was a phenomenon from the sphere of culture” (Chałasiński 1970, 51). Therefore, the nationalization of peasants included also their influence by the national culture that evolved while absorbing certain elements of peasant culture. The process shapes human personality, which, referring to the works of William McDougall and John Dewey, he described as a connected set of social roles that are played by people and are formed as they adapt to existing social situations. (Chałasiński 1927; Chałasiński 1935c). Rather than formulate elaborate or precise definitions of culture, he relied on Malinowski’s and Znaniński’s concepts and was satisfied with a quite general statement that culture was nothing more than the entirety of human life transforming because of changes that took place in a person’s environment.

Chałasiński believed that “(...) an individual and their biography were the product of upbringing and actions implemented within specific patterns of culture, certain systems of values, traditions, ideals, myths, beliefs, etc.” (Komendera 2002, 31). Once culture was internalized as a result of the socialization process, the fundamental mechanism for the formation of social relations in a national group was the sense of community that shaped the social bonds and integrated them. He saw a fully formed nation as a collective of a generally social character, exercising social impact on all classes within this large social group – as a phenomenon extending above and beyond social classes (classless or, more specifically, supra-class). Consequently, it also had to include the peasant population, which proved, Chałasiński argued, that nation was a moral community. Belonging to a nation harmonizes the development of human personality and gives meaning to our existence and embeddedness (Chałasiński 1948a, 12). Because of these theses, Chałasiński’s sociology of nation bears some resemblance to Durkheim, who essentially perceives nations as modern varieties of collective moral systems (Durkheim 1999 [1893], 398). The resulting national pride pushes people to take action so as to make their nation better and more just (Chałasiński 1968, 150). As a result, nation develops the principle of the ethos of social democracy and emerges as a moral community integrating members of all classes and social strata.

Strengthening national ties and enriching human personality, this aspect has nothing to do with national egoism or xenophobia. The moral community of a nation is never closed or static. Given its openness to a new cultural content and the principle of belonging on a voluntary basis, a nation cannot be hermetic or based on “inbreeding,” both of which are characteristic of national resentments (Chałasiński 1968, 38). The latter are an integral part of nationalism which, however, is not an element of the culture of the nation but a political ideology fabricated by the state to integrate citizens around the goals it set for itself. This is how a nation and its culture can become a material used for political purposes. Nationalism as a state ideology cannot create strong and long-lasting social ties, but it can enable a temporary political mobilization. By contrast, the moral community of culture is a longer-lasting, much stronger, and more stable factor generating the social bonds that integrate a nation and form the personality of its members.

Chałasiński said that a nation was “(...) a historically formed community of culture based on a common territory, a common economic system and own organisation of the state (...)”

(Chęciński 1968, 173). At the same time, both the economy and the institution of the state are always secondary to culture. With the exclusion of a few cases, a nation defined as a community of culture does not correspond to the political community of the citizens of a state, as evidenced by numerous examples from Central and Eastern Europe, with Poland indicated by Chęciński as the most compelling case. Similar to Znaniecki, he also opposed the identification of a nation with the state, which was a popular belief in Western sociology since August Comte and Herbert Spencer (Mucha 2009, 21–22).

He claimed that the state as a political institution is something separate from the nation, which is a large social group distinguished by a specific culture. Nevertheless, he believed that a democratic state, through its institutions (for example, educational ones), is able to strengthen and develop national culture. He enthusiastically accepted the rebirth of Polish statehood, but the May Coup in Poland in 1926 and the authoritarian regimes in Poland and elsewhere in Europe in the 1930s, forced him to rethink the role of the state in the nation-building process (Chęciński 1933, 388). He saw it as an instrument for building social cohesion, but he wrote that for this to be possible, the state's authorities and its agencies and officials "(...) must avoid coercion and appeal to the voluntary action of citizens resulting from the understanding of common tasks and goals" (Chęciński 1934, 26–27). Therefore, it must be a democratic state, thus "(...) similarly to Bronisław Malinowski, Chęciński includes democracy in the essence of the nation" (Nowakowski 1983, 399). Non-democratic states usually transform the idea of the nation into the ideology of nationalism.

The types of social structure, economy, and state institutions constitute the "social background" where the nation is formed. While secondary to culture, they play an important role in the process of the genesis of a nation. Each social phenomenon is a derivative of specific historical conditions that generate specific economic conditions, which then have a significant impact on the formation of social relations and systems of values. In Chęciński's opinion, an explanation of the phenomenon of nation must always refer to specific national cultures originating from specific foundations (Chęciński 1966a, 41). The sociology of nation must explain what inspired this social background for the creation of a culture that, socialized by members of a given social group, provides the content for the formation of social ties and, consequently, regulation of social relations based on the feeling of being a member of a moral community that stands above a class. Following the thesis of Ludwik Krzywicki, he claimed that the sociology of a nation is by its very nature historical sociology (Chęciński 1968, 201). Uninterested in constructing abstract schemes of social change leading to the formation of the nation, Chęciński believed that the sociology of the nation was about describing the formation and transformation of a specific nation in a specific social background. He studied the case of the Polish nation, specifically the nationalization of Polish peasants.

Chęciński perceived this process as a possibility to enrich national culture with elements of folk culture. He appreciated the values of the latter, convinced that it was necessary to strive to develop the social and institutional solutions that would give peasants the opportunity "(...) to be who they are and the right to their social culture and distinction while recognising and emphasising their right to participate in the national culture and values" (Jagiełło-Łysiowa 1980, 65). This approach reveals what was characteristic of his scientific research – a strong identification with the environment that was the subject of his research, motivated by his agrarian thinking (Kłosowska 1984, 11). This makes Chęciński's sociology an applied science where scholars should not only be experts in the discipline but can never lose the social and moral sense of what they do and use their own research to try to influence the social reality, making it better in every possible aspect (Chęciński 1949, 277).

Chęciński's sociology of nation describing the nationalization of Polish peasantry is undoubtedly a culturalist sociology; however, it rejects the sociological reductionism that limits the process of nation formation only to the significance of national culture. While cultural phenomena constitute the empirical basis of the human world, they do not function in a vacuum. They are the product of specific historical conditions that have an effect on the form and dynamics of social

relations. Only a multidimensional and multifactorial analysis can provide an answer to the question about the genesis of a nation, its constitutive features, and the processes it is subjected to.

The medieval origins of the Polish nation

Chałasiński argued that every nation was a supra-class cultural community integrated by moral ties. Always embedded in a specific territory, it is influenced by the institution of the state and the economic system in which it exists. Nevertheless, these universal rules are each time adjusted because of the specific historical and social background where the nation-forming processes occur. Chałasiński called for analyzing concrete historical cases. However, when reading his books and articles, one sometimes has the impression that he fell into his own teleological trap when he said that the formation of a nation was a process of its egalitarianization and democratization. A cultural group becomes a nation when it incorporates all social strata, including those marginalized for centuries such as peasants (Chałasiński 1970, 52–53). In some cases, his analysis does not focus on the description of a specific case but follows the changes through the prism of the (supposedly necessary) goal – the emergence of a democratic and egalitarian nation.

Chałasiński argued that the formation of a nation was a long historical process. He was convinced that the origins of national cultures dated back to long before the modern era. He did not underestimate the pre-national tribal cultures, described for example by Bronisław Malinowski (2001 [1947], 267), which could serve as the starting point for the formation of a nation. Chałasiński highlighted that many of their elements were included in the canons of national cultures. At the same time, he was not a primordial scholar, and he rejected the views of the British-Polish anthropologist, who said that tribal cultures became national cultures as a result of the former merging into larger modern collectives (Chałasiński 1968, 392). He believed that the origins of national cultures lay in the Middle Ages because this was when national myths began to appear, paving the way for national culture and, with time, national identity. Transformed during the Reformation, when national languages started emerging, and supplemented by the Enlightenment and its ideals of freedom of the people, workers, and peasants in industrializing Europe, they became the foundation for the formation of modern nations.

A sociological analysis of the formation and transformation of a nation can only be complete when it refers to the earliest processes of national genesis. This claim inexplicitly expresses the postulate that social processes should be analyzed in the *longue durée* perspective, a theoretical and methodological perspective referring to Durkheimian ideas, popularized by historians of the Annales school, including its co-founder Ferdinand Braudel (Braudel 2006 [2003], 29, 69). His search for the cradle of national consciousness in the Middle Ages places Chałasiński among perennialist theorists. He based his research and the thesis drawn from it on the concept created by the Polish medievalist Roman Grodecki. This theory was prevalent in Polish mediaevalist studies and, more broadly, also in social sciences and humanities almost until the 1980s (see Zientara 2017).

According to Chałasiński, the first foundations for the national consciousness in Poland can be traced back to the Middle Ages. Episcopal synods adopted resolutions that were intended to favor and protect the Polish people and clergy at the expense of their German counterparts as early as the 13th century. Referring to the works on national antagonism by Ludwik Gumplowicz as well as to Bystron's papers on "national megalomania" and Simmel's concept of "Other," he maintained that contact with otherness and attempts to achieve ethnic domination in the Middle Ages gave rise to the formation of Polish ethnicity (Chałasiński 1968, 489). The Polish language and the culture expressed in it became a permanent element in the ideology and culture of, first, the court and then the state, extending to the clergy, middle and wealthy nobility, as well as representatives of certain groups of the Polish or Polonized bourgeoisie. Peasants standing at the bottom of the social ladder at that time were not included in these processes. This is also when national myths started emerging: "(...) not always explicitly sacred, frequently more secular but still retaining some elements of the

myth, when associated with an irrational attitude of faith in the nation as the highest and nearly sacral value that adds meaning to the lives of individuals” (Chałasiński 1968, 492).

Stefan Czarnowski, who researched the role of the cult of Saint Patrick in the processes of shaping ethnic identity, adopted the concept of the nation-generating function of myths. The foundation of the emerging culture in Poland was the myth about the ethnogenesis of the Polish nobility, which served as a class separator between the latter and the peasantry. The nobility were believed to originate from the biblical figure of Japheth, while peasants were to be the descendants of his brother Ham. Carrying the burden of Noah’s cursed son, peasants were perceived in the nobility’s imaginary as ethnically alien and destined to subordinate social roles. In Chałasiński’s opinion, these ideas marked the inception of the anti-peasant aspects in the Polish national culture. His concept of the sacralization of the ethnos and the nation-building functions of myths is similar to the one proposed by Marcel Mauss, even if the author of *The Younger Generation of Peasants* does not explicitly mention it (Mauss 1969, 594). The nation-forming role of myths also plays a key part in Anthony Smith’s ethnosymbolism (Smith 2009 [1986], 69–102).

In the 15th century, the national consciousness began to be identified with the state consciousness, when a political nation of the nobility constituted itself in the multinational Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was composed of representatives of the ethnically Polish as well as German, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian nobility who were citizens of the state. Peasants and burghers (Jewish, German, and Armenian) were excluded from this definition of the nation. At that time, certain national myths forming the contemporary culture solidified. The national mythology determining the Polish culture was enriched with a new myth legitimizing the rule of the nobility. It once again highlighted their unique origins indicating them as the descendants of the Iranian nomadic tribes, the Sarmatians, who conquered the Slavs. As farmers incapable of fighting and ignorant of freedom, the latter were presented as ancestors of Polish peasants (Chałasiński 1966a, 40).

According to Chałasiński, the nation-forming processes accelerated during the Renaissance and Reformation when uniform national languages began to develop and codify across Western Europe and Poland. As carriers of collective ideas about nations, they proved important for the formation of national communities (Chałasiński 1968, 140). Peasants were excluded from the emerging national community as unempowered masses and subjects of the nobility. From the 17th century onwards, Poland saw repeated feudalism. A higher demand for Polish grain and a low technological advancement of land cultivation resulted in an increase in the level of forced labor and serfdom of peasants. The national culture, with its mythology, perfectly legitimized this state of affairs. Peasants were treated like “(...) passive and uncreative masses that on their own had directly never brought anything positive to any area of national life” (Chałasiński 1938a, 72–73). The social and economic separation of peasants and their culture delayed the formation of the supra-class moral community that is a modern nation.

The birth of the modern nation

Chałasiński shared the views of the Polish-Jewish historian Marceli Handelsman, who believed that as a result of the circumstances caused by the French Revolution, a completely new type of social background was created, which enabled the emergence of the thus far unknown new forms of social life (Handelsman 1973, 24–29). The collapse of the class society and the development of political ideas proclaiming equality and political freedoms made it possible for a new democratic model of social relations to come forth. Consequently, political ideas had a significant impact on the formation of the model members of the national community (Chałasiński 1968, 392). The activity of intellectuals and political activists directly or ideologically associated with the French Revolution “(...) crystallised the idea of the nation as independent of the state, the Church and the army, different from the linguistic and moral community, and as a dynamic community that consciously realises its future in accordance with its social and moral ideals” (Chałasiński 1968: 124). The nation took over from the Church the function of a catalyst for the formation of a moral community

incorporating all social strata, also peasants, independent of any political institutions such as the state. Once again, Chałasiński's work seems to be related, albeit not directly, to Durkheim's similar views on the role of a nation, which, according to the French scholar, replaced the Church in the processes of social integration (Durkheim 2010 [1912], 206).

He accepted the claims of the Marxist sociologist Ludwik Krzywicki, who wrote that the decline of the feudal economy and the birth of capitalism enabled the emergence of a mass-class society, which, despite differences, was integrated by the idea of emancipation of all social classes, including the disadvantaged ones (workers and peasants) (Chałasiński 1976, 18). Similar to Krzywicki, Chałasiński also saw the nation as a historical community that arose after the economic collapse of feudal societies. As a result of the political and economic transformation initiated in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a new type of social background came into view in Western Europe which contributed to the development of the bourgeoisie and burghers as the social strata generating processes leading to the formation of a modern nation (Chałasiński 1968, 149). A nearly identical idea can be found in the concept of dual revolution, whose author, Eric Hobsbawm, refers to Marxism seeking to explain the genesis of a nation (Hobsbawm 2013 [1963], 5).

In his studies, Chałasiński emphasized the historical continuity of culture as the basic source for the formation processes of a nation that, unlike other cultural formations, embraces all social strata. Nation is a contemporary transformation of culture adapted to the conditions of modern society (Chałasiński 1968, 173). Intellectually, it reveals affinity to the perspective of chronological modernism which sees a nation as a relatively new phenomenon whose emergence should be associated with the formation of modern society (Poniedziałek 2021, 45–120). At the same time, it should be remembered that while nations are an effect of socio-cultural and economic changes related to modernity, they also have their cultural and, one would like to say, ethnic sources in the distant past. This statement once again brings Chałasiński's concept closer to Smith's theorems (Smith 2009 [1986], 16–23).

Chałasiński noted, however, that the bourgeoisie, part of the aristocracy and rich burghers distorted the idea of an egalitarian and democratic nation, and used it to persecute and oppress the masses, workers, and, particularly, peasants (Miller 1984, 28). He wrote: "After the Great Revolution, the ruling classes — the aristocracy and high bourgeoisie — striving to preserve their leadership, could no longer do without the idea of nation. It was to serve their purpose of confirming their legitimacy and sanction of their moral right to rule the masses. By annexing this idea for themselves, they gave it a reactionary and conservative character, elitist and anti-popular in practice, if not in slogans, as well as hostile, aggressive and possessive in relation to other nations. The conservative and reactionary idea of nation became an essential ideological element of the concept of nationalism" (Chałasiński 1968, 40). States turned it into a tool serving their own policies, which, as the history of the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century showed, resulted in bloody wars fought in the name of nations (Chałasiński 1969a, 149). The statements about the idea of the nation as an instrument of the bourgeoisie's class rule over the people were borrowed from Karl Marx, who used them to develop his theory of the genesis of nations (Marx, Engels 1962 [1848], 525). Thus, Chałasiński's culturalism was enriched with elements of Marx's sociology of nations (Poniedziałek 2018, 70–79).

In Poland, like in Western Europe, the disintegration of feudalism in the economy and politics entailed the decomposition of the class-based social structure. The change in the social background, along with the diffusion of innovation — the national idea — enabled the formation of a modern nation. Developmentally lagging behind, partially because of the partitions (Poland did not exist as an independent state between 1795 and 1918 when its lands were divided by Russia, Austria, and Prussia), Poland did not generate the middle class or bourgeoisie in its territories to the likes of those that provided the social foundation for new nations emerging across Western Europe. In Poland, this place was taken by the intelligentsia recruiting largely from the middle and poor nobility. It assumed the moral value that constituted the nobility nation — honor (Komendera 2002, 32). The intelligentsia as a social stratum was formed when the impoverished nobility, having lost their

material basis in the form of land estates, had to migrate to cities and were forced to seek paid work in intellectual occupations to survive. Following the internal migration of the nobility to cities, the “intelligentsia ghetto” was formed.

Writing about the “intelligentsia ghetto” and its negative impact on social cohesion and the formation of a modern national identity, he drew on the assessments of this social layer that appeared in the writings of philosophers Aleksander Świętochowski and Stanisław Brzozowski (Kłoskowska 1984, 13). Chałasiński saw the “intelligentsia ghetto” as a specific “(...) form of social concentration like an island of a population isolated within a larger community — its formation is determined by the self-defence tendencies of the group at risk of annihilation, which merges following the principles of traditionalism” (Chałasiński 1946, 22). The wealthy nobility and aristocracy adopted a free approach to culture and values. The declassed nobility, having lost their fortunes and re-emerging as Poland’s intelligentsia, turned culture, literature, and “social refinement” into the fundamental class distinctions to protect themselves from further downgrading by allowing the newly emerging national culture to be influenced by peasant culture. Those aspects were cared for and insisted on (Chałasiński 1968, 287–291). A division was made, which was later petrified, into the culture of the masters, identified with national culture, and the plebeian culture that revolved around the value of physical work — a foreign concept for the national culture of the time (Łysiowa 1984, 67). The intelligentsia formed social bonds based on family networks, social background, education, and patterns of behavior relating to national culture. They recreated the social ties and national culture in institutions that became their places of work: offices, schools, universities, cultural centers, etc. The lifestyle expressed through specific rituals and founded on the ethos associated with the cultivated national culture and Polish language, subjected to the pressure of denationalization by the authorities of the partitioning countries, became the foundation of the national culture represented by the intelligentsia. It became a source of social recognition and compensation for the decline and loss of land and estates. National culture emerged as a mechanism for creating class distinction, and peasants were excluded from it for fear of further downgrading the intelligentsia. National culture and intelligentsia became a substitute for the nobility (Chałasiński 1946, 42; Kulas 2021, 31). In an effort to maintain their distinctiveness, the intelligentsia relied, to a large extent, on the noble aversion to the peasant population, which largely denied the right to be Polish. As Chałasiński emphasized, it was “(...) the last social barrier that separated the nobility - the intelligentsia from the common people” (Chałasiński 1946, 42).

This claim has been criticized. Polish historian Stefan Kiniewicz argued that the Polish intelligentsia of that time was also recruited, to some extent, from other social classes, from the bourgeoisie, from the Polonizing national minorities (for example, Germans or Jews), and also, although sporadically, from the peasants who were moving up socially (Kiniewicz 2021, 516). Chałasiński, however, claimed that the level of urbanization of Polish lands was low, the populations of Polish townspeople were small, their wealth meager, and great numbers of impoverished nobility were migrating to cities. It was in this context that the intelligentsia took shape, drawing largely on that group of nobles (Chałasiński 1946, 85). The difference between Western Europe, where the intelligentsia came largely from the bourgeoisie, and Poland, where the intelligentsia were recruited mainly from the nobility, resulted in the civilizational backwardness of Polish lands (Chałasiński 1968, 158). However, it should be remembered that not every impoverished nobleman became a member of the intelligentsia and not every member of the intelligentsia came from this social class. Chałasiński emphasized that the social cohesion of this class, the high level of group solidarity, the number of members, and the symbolic domination meant that they had the greatest influence on the formation of the intelligentsia and the national culture in Poland. (Chałasiński 1978, 27–35).

Following Znaniecki, Chałasiński claimed that intellectuals, writers, and artists played a special role in the process of forming the nation’s culture. He wrote: “Without the leading intellectual centres, where ideas are generated, there would be no nation. It is the national role of such centres to reflect on the nation, these centres are the organs of the nation’s thinking about itself, its goals and

vocation, they are the organs of the national self-knowledge” (Chałasiński 1968, 33). In the countries of Western Europe, such individuals became the functionaries of the state institutions which saw the promotion of national culture as a priority in their policy. Such creators are also the exponents of the will of people in whom a sense of national community is born. This is particularly important where there is no institution of the state that could co-shape the national culture through its state agendas. He pointed to the example of Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Chałasiński 1968, 111). These people become the shepherds of the nation because “(...) They are not interested in the historical truth of what was but in the moral greatness of what ought to be. They shape historical figures from this point of view so that they can serve as role models for the youth” (Chałasiński 1966a, 39). This is why literature played a particular role in the nation-forming processes in Poland, where it largely replaced the institutions of the state. It enabled the dissemination of myths, values, norms, and national ideals. Literary heroes became the moral beacons guiding the members of the nation. Belles-lettres revealed a considerable creative potential in creating and reproducing national myths and values, driving the social activity of the masses who incorporated the content of the national culture (Siekierski 1984, 69).

Created by representatives of the Polish intelligentsia, the impact of the literary works was largely limited to this social class, as the vast majority of peasants were illiterate and thus excluded from the possibility of learning the national culture through reading. The intelligentsia developed the cultural and institutional foundations for the formation of a modern nation of elite character, closed within one social stratum. The intelligentsia-generated national culture was based on the abstract values of literary culture and related patterns of behavior, myths about the past greatness of the nation, and references to the nobility models of the First Republic of Poland. In this sense, the ideas of the intelligentsia-nation and culture of the masters became the instruments of the class rule over the class of peasants, who, due to their social origins and ignorance of the canons of the intelligentsia culture, were not treated as an integral part of the nation. Peasants as a social group were perceived as nationally alien, while their culture, with its supreme value of the land and land cultivation, was genetically incompatible with the national culture of the intelligentsia. According to Chałasiński, this process inhibited the formation of a modern, democratic, and supra-class Polish nation. On the day when Poland regained independence in 1918, the society of the new state was a blend of two cultures supposedly alien to each other: the national-intelligentsia culture (culture of the masters), which prevented the socio-national emancipation of the masses, and the peasant culture, which started waking up from its historical lethargy and striving for national empowerment (Chałasiński 1946, 51, 64).

The creation of Polish national culture without the participation of peasant culture, in contrast to other countries of Central or Eastern Europe, for example, Serbia and Bulgaria, where national cultures were shaped mainly on the folk component, resembles the Russian case, where the national culture that was shaped in the 19th century also had noble and intelligentsia sources (Oxydentalists). There, attempts to include folk and peasant elements into it were also excluded, as proposed by activists of the Slavophile movement (Koprowski 2012, 388). Ernest Gellner in his classic book “Nations and Nationalism” described two types of national identity and nationalism. The first, civic and state, in Megalomania (the code name for the Austro-Hungarian Empire), where higher culture socializes the masses to the nation through the operation of state institutions. The second one occurs in Ruritania (countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland), where agrarian societies devoid of higher culture create national identity in reference to folklore and folk cultures (Gellner 1991 [1983]). This thesis is true in relation to Serbia and Bulgaria, but Chałasiński’s findings indicate that the classical and internationally recognized Gellnerian division does not apply in this case. It would be similar in the case of Russia.

Chałasiński assumed that a modern nation was a moral and supra-class community of people socialized for the same culture. Consequently, a nation could become real and true only when Polish peasants, previously excluded from it by the nobility-derived intelligentsia, were included within the sphere of its impact. In his opinion, the birth of the modern Polish nation would coincide with the

nationalization of the peasantry as an integral and extremely important element of the social background of national culture. As he indicated, in his thinking he drew from the writings of the Enlightenment philosophers (Stanisław Staszic and Hugon Kołłątaj) working for the reforms of Poland in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (when Poland lost its independence), associated with the democratic, intellectual and political group called “Kuznica Kołłątajowska” (Kołłątaj’s Forge) (Chałasiński 1968, 201). He believed that the peasant “shape of life” was a value in itself. By becoming full members of the nation, peasants should not abandon it; on the contrary, elements of their culture could and should enrich the national culture. His democratic views and belief in progress, which was to be expressed through the emergence of a modern nation, harmonized with the agrarian ethos that opposed the modernist manner driven by the Enlightenment idea of social evolution, where the modernization of societies was to simultaneously cause the atrophy of rural life.

Chałasiński’s case is not unique – neither in Poland nor in Central and Eastern Europe. Many scholars, including sociologists, despite their immersion in the Western academic world and in-depth knowledge of social evolution theories and the theory of modernization in the socio-political and economic context of low-industrialized countries gaining statehood after 1918, turned to the largest community, that is, peasants, and the transformation of their consciousness from local to national. The peasant “(...) tradition, language and religion were to be the main treasuries of this identity. It was them and the intelligentsia, rather than the state, that represented ‘national society,’ insisting on preserving the tradition” (Mucha 2009, 13). Chałasiński’s ideas about the important role of the peasant class and its culture in the formation of the modern Polish nation in the reborn state are part of the Central European and, particularly, Polish sociological research regarding nations (Kurczewska 1979, 310).

The nationalization of peasants in the Second Republic of Poland

Chałasiński argued that the process of Poland’s national integration slowly began to take place in the interwar period (1918–1939). Noticeably, peasants started growing into the existing national culture and making attempts to modify it by supplementing it with folk elements. Both processes were related to the formation of a peasant class aware of its own value and the formation in the peasant consciousness of an individual personal model of a peasant-citizen, a peasant as a member of the Polish nation (Nowakowski 1980, 12). This was a visible sign of breaking the limitations of the class society and the democratization of the nation in which peasants, who “(...) until then had lived on the periphery of the national community,” now felt equal members” (Chałasiński 1938a, 545).

The immersion of the peasant population in the nation was connected with their transition from the oral culture to the national culture of the written national language disseminated by schools that the peasant youth had to start attending after Poland regained independence in 1918, through literature and mass media reaching the countryside (Komendera 2002, 30). Given that the nation is a cultural phenomenon and the culture of the Polish nation in the interwar period was largely derived from the intelligentsia, upon entering the national culture, the peasant population had to absorb at least part of the urban and intelligentsia culture (Chałasiński 1969a, 3). On the one hand, the belles-lettres read in the countryside reflected the values of the intelligentsia culture, offering the peasant youth the role models typical of the intelligentsia which did not match the reality of rural areas (Chałasiński 1966a, 39). On the other hand, without the intellectual literature, peasants would not have moved beyond the boundaries of their own local communities and would not have tried to enter the orbit of national culture (Siekierski 1984, 71).

The same applied to school and its impact. Chałasiński pointed out that school reproduced the social reality with its inequality expressed by the dichotomous division into “masters” and peasants (Chałasiński 1933, 388). He recognized the mechanism of symbolic violence, much later propagated by Pierre Bourdieu, incorporated into educational institutions (Bourdieu 1983). Chałasiński wrote that educational institutions, guided by the canon of intelligentsia culture, not only reproduce the

division into the culture of “lords” and peasants but also evoke in the minds of the latter a sense of self-deprecation and a desire to abandon their own culture and adopt the values and norms of the lordly culture. He described the process itself without bothering to characterize this mechanism in the language of abstract sociological theory useful in research in other countries and under other conditions. The concept of symbolic violence was theoretically developed only by Bourdieu (Borowska 2006, 137).

The nation appears to have emerged as a product of the state education system. The impact of Chałasiński’s pioneering theorem was essentially limited to Polish sociology. Globally, the American historian, Eugene Weber, is credited for the authorship of this concept. In his classic monograph, *Peasants into Frenchman*, he described the impact of the French school system on the nationalization of French peasants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Weber 1976). His work came out more than 40 years after Chałasiński published his first books and articles dedicated to this phenomenon. To prevent the negative influence of the state education on the peasant youth, Chałasiński called for the development of a folk education system, which would be supported by folk literature and could gradually be recognized by the peasant youth “(...) as a tool for shaping their social ideals and their personality” (Chałasiński 1938b, 113).

The sense of connection with the nation formed the national consciousness and the sense of patriotism in the minds of peasants. The state and its educational agendas exploited the idea of the nation, deforming into xenophobic nationalism. This is when the nation ceased to appear as an inclusive moral community and began to be imagined as an ethnically and culturally homogeneous social group strictly subordinated to the state. In the 1930s, the authorities of the Second Republic of Poland launched their nationalist policy of assimilation addressed to national minorities which accounted for 31% of the state’s society. It applied to Ukrainians (14%) and Polish Jews (10%) (Porter-Szűcs 2021, 168–174). Chałasiński’s distrust of the state stemmed from his personal experience and observation of the formation of authoritarian and nationalist regimes in Europe in the 1930s (Kurczewska 1979, 11). In his article published in 1933, he wrote, “(...) making the state guard national values is unnecessary and simply dangerous for the development of national culture and people. It is unnecessary because if the cultural values of a nation cannot secure their own viability themselves, no policeman’s baton will defend them; if they are viable, they will withstand the fight even against the state, as was Poland’s case during the partitions” (Chałasiński 1933, 388). As mentioned earlier, Chałasiński believed in the causative power of the state, but to him, it should be a fully democratic state, coordinating grassroots initiatives of citizens and respecting the ethnic and cultural diversity of the societies inhabiting it. Only then, through its educational and cultural institutions, is it able to include rightly the previously excluded social classes in the circulation of a holistic national culture (Chałasiński 1934, 26–27).

A vital point in the nationalization of peasants was the emergence of their collective consciousness as they started identifying with their social stratum. It was a process in which social organizations operating in the countryside, primarily the Union of Rural Youth “Wici” (in Polish: *Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej RP* “Wici,” *ZMW RP* “Wici”), played an extremely important role. Their program included postulates to promote the values of peasant culture and make it an integral part of national culture. Chałasiński also believed that rural youth organizations acted as intermediaries between rural communities and national society. He wrote that the peasant youth had a double part to play in them — as individuals with their particular aspirations who were associated as “(...) members of a wider community (the state, nation, Church, peasant class, etc.)” (Chałasiński 1938b, 362).

The peasant movement provided opportunities to create “(...) the peasant variant of national culture and social life, a variant embedded both in traditional rural values and the accepted, albeit selected general values. It was oriented towards a cultural symbiosis born out of the internal transformation and social modernization of the countryside, with the preservation of the basic shape of rural culture and life as a separate social organism” (Jagiello-Lysiowa 1980, 67). The observation that the nation was a construct extending beyond social classes resulted not only from

Chałasiński's immersion in a specific intellectual tradition but also from his studies of the young peasant movement in the 1930s, published in the series *The Younger Generation of Peasants*. He saw it as "(...) a national movement. The sense of peasantry among the young rural generation is inextricably linked with the ambition to play a creative social role in the reconstruction of the socio-cultural structure of the nation" (Chałasiński 1938b, 554–555). Morphing into a social stratum, peasants become part of the nation also in the social sense; however, the latter can only emerge in its modern form as a result of a cultural and social amalgamation, a creative fusion of values represented by different social strata and classes.

He noticed the formation and popularization of the role model of peasants-citizens, who identified with the stratum they came from while feeling full members of the Polish nation. Their aspirations included not only a pursuit of their own personal and professional self-improvement but also a desire for the renewal of national culture and supplementing it with folk components. The democracy of the national ethnos, the egalitarianization of personal rights and freedoms, and the sense of personal dignity, or honour, once characteristic of the nobility and now claimed by the peasant youth, emerged as integral parts of this personality. Influenced by the writings of the Marxist thinker Stanisław Brzozowski, Chałasiński believed that the value expressed in the apotheosis and creative ennoblement of both intellectual and physical work, and peasant work in particular, was of paramount importance for national culture (Jagiełło-Łysiowa 1984, 59). Inspired by his agrarian views, he argued that a new national culture should be formed on this value as the only one that could enable the in-depth and moral integration of the nation.

The most important element of the peasant role model, Chałasiński writes, is the feeling of "(...) the self-determination regarding oneself and the Polish nation, independence from the traditional criteria of the upper classes and the constant rising on one's own" (Chałasiński 1938b, 362). This is a crucial moment because a modern nation is born when the sense of honor and the voluntary nature of national ties are disseminated in the awareness of the disadvantaged classes — primarily the peasant population in Poland's case (Chałasiński 1966a, 41). "For the relationship between socialization and individualization to form it was first necessary to loosen the ties with the family and traditional authorities, while the relationship with the nation was strengthened. The awareness of being a part of the nation and the peasant class entailed the search for one's own opportunities in a new social role" (Miller 1984, 26–27). This role was that of a member of the Polish nation.

Chałasiński described the first phase of the nationalization and embedding of peasants in the Polish culture "(...) through the participation of the peasant youth in the socio-political movement; the phase of the struggle for the value of the peasant culture for the national culture and the recognition of the partner role of the masses in the Polish state; the phase that takes place, among others, in rural youth associations (primarily the ZMW RP "Wici") before the war and turns into the fight for the national liberation during the German occupation, mainly in the ranks of the Polish Peasants' Battalions" (Gołębiowski 1984, 49). Although the supra-class Polish nation started constituting itself in the Second Republic of Poland, it was a period of two cultures: that of the masters, recognized as the national culture, and that of the peasants, which emerged from hard labor, perceived as less valuable and thus non-national. According to the intelligentsia, peasants were at a lower level of social development. National literature, school curricula, and even mass culture contributed to the petrification of this reality (Chałasiński 1946, 16). The latter process was further facilitated by the essentially anti-peasant policy of the authoritarian Polish state, which not only failed to meet the needs of the peasant population but also frequently imprisoned peasant activists or violently crushed peasants' revolts (Porter-Szűcs 2021, 190–198).

Nevertheless, peasants ceased to be merely a "raw material of history" and started to feel as its co-creators. The nationalization of peasants certainly made it possible for Poland to regain independence. Despite the intelligentsia-dictated character of schools, the peasant youth that attended them gained the cultural capital that allowed them to think of themselves in national terms. "At the same time, the social peasant movements, the formation of political parties, and new institutions such as people's universities and various forms of agricultural education, altered the

image of rural life and taught young people to think about the entire peasant stratum and its role in the life of the nation and the state” (Miller 1984, 26). Only the pre-1939 nationalization of the masses – workers and, above all, peasants as the dominating population in pre-war Poland – allowed for a fully modern nation to form itself (Chałasiński 1970, 100).

A modern nation in the People’s Republic of Poland

After 1945, Poland fell into the orbit of the Soviet Union’s influence, whose pressure enforced change in the country’s political and economic system. Poland began to be governed by the Russia-steered Communist Party. After the Second World War, the nationalization of peasants significantly accelerated as the process continued in the context of the fundamental and radical socio-political changes that took place between 1945 and 1956. Stalinism in Poland ended in 1956, but the authoritarian rule of the communist party lasted until 1989. On the one hand, the country was patently ruled by the communist party, on the other, it was rapidly modernizing. Poland was undergoing intensive industrialization and becoming less agrarian, less rural. The urban population was growing, and the social infrastructure in the countryside and the city was progressing. Still, despite noticeable socio-economic development, Poland remained a comparatively poor and civilizationally backward country (Davies 2010 [2005], 1051–1061). Poland’s dynamic industrialization, migrations of the rural youth to cities, increased school enrolment rates, and literacy levels in rural areas advanced the processes of empowerment and nationalization of the Polish countryside initiated in the Second Polish Republic (Chałasiński 1970, 100). They included the dissemination in the countryside of the “(...) individual-professional and civilizational-cultural aspirations developed as a result of equal life opportunities among the younger generation (...), who gained the possibility to choose a profession (also that of a farmer) and individually participate in the national and global culture whose values became accessible also in rural environments” (Gołębiowski 1984, 49). A noticeable achievement of Poland during the Polish People’s Republic (1945–1989) was the social and material advancement of the peasant class, whose representatives could study in schools at all levels, choose occupations other than peasant occupations, and move to cities (Bukraba-Rylska 2008, 444–448).

In his discussion of the peasant youth memoirs collection, *The Advancement of the Generation*, Chałasiński makes a definitive statement when referring to changes in the Polish countryside: “What is the general sociological meaning of this transformation? Integration of the nation! The integration of the nation as a consequence of the leveling of the former class divisions and the elimination of old class barriers that blocked access to culture — national culture — for the masses” (Chałasiński 1966a, 37). He emphasized that the rural representatives of the younger generation in the People’s Republic of Poland no longer differed from the country’s youth in general or those of the intelligentsia origins in particular. He believed that the discovery of one’s own nation was connected with the rural youth gaining their individual freedom. In his opinion, the formation and consolidation of the modern Polish nation after the Second World War was inextricably linked with two aspects of social change. “The first was the growing into the national culture and the nationalization of the folk strata. The second was the autonomy of human personality gained by the social strata — peasants and workers — which prior to the revolution existed as unfree groups, semi-slaved, subordinate and spiritually dependent on the upper classes of the masters” (Chałasiński 1968, 36).

Chałasiński remained faithful to his agrarian views even after the war. His evaluation of the social advancement of the Polish countryside was unequivocally positive. He hoped that the national culture shaped by the upper classes would undergo a far-reaching transformation when supplemented with certain components of peasant culture. He referred to the Scandinavian countries as model states whose national culture is largely plebeian, if not peasant (Łysiowa 1984, 62). He suggested that the studying rural youth could be the innovators in this area. However, their rapid escape from the countryside, abandonment of agriculture as their primary vocation, the loss of

communication with peasant communities, and the assimilation of intellectual cultural patterns by the socially advancing rural youth, buried Chałasiński's hopes for the emergence of a new national culture and a new nation (Wąsowicz 1984, 91).

Shortly after the end of the war, he envisaged the education system, particularly universities, as the cradle of mechanisms for the development of a new Polish intelligentsia that would radically transform the national culture, finally making it a people's culture, free of class divisions (Chałasiński 1946, 12). To this end, he intensified his efforts to promote the idea of a new university in Łódź as an institution implementing a program for the empowerment of peasants through education, in alignment with his agrarian views (Winclawski 1989, XXIX). In his inaugural lecture at the newly established University of Łódź, delivered on 13 January 1946, he talked about the nobility-derived genealogy of the Polish intelligentsia responsible for the formation of the class-exclusive national culture (Ważniewski 2019, 180). This sparked protests from part of the academic community and brought him into conflict with traditionalist academics (see Zysiak 2023). In his journalistic texts from that period, Chałasiński continued his line of argumentation about the national culture of the masters and the tradition of interwar Poland, always taking the side of the peasant class from which he did not originate but with which he identified strongly already before the war (Kłoskowska 1984, 14).

However, he soon realized that schools and universities were institutions that reproduced the intelligentsia-imposed models of culture. Despite the official claims of the state authorities about promoting the policy of class emancipation and forming the nation of the people, the said institutions served the purpose of guarding the "master" or intelligentsia-urban domination (Winclawski 1989, XXXIII). By providing the peasant youth with the opportunity to obtain education, the higher education system dynamized their aspirations to leave the countryside, abandon the peasant culture, and assimilate the national culture driven by the intelligentsia (Gołębiowski 1984, 43). Chałasiński was aware that the national culture was still the intelligentsia culture that continued to determine the patterns of conduct, values, norms, and national myths. It also shaped the class distinctions which, despite the social advancement of intellectuals of peasant origin, still highlighted their worse social position (Wąsewicz 1984, 90). The urbanity of the intelligentsia culture was largely a reproduction of the former "intelligentsia ghetto," which prevented the emergence of the supra-class moral community of the nation as a compilation of what is urban and peasant (Chałasiński 1969a, 20–21).

He positively assessed the structural change occurring in the countryside in communist Poland, including the establishment of modern cultural centers and schools and the professionalization of farmers. However, he noticed the slow disappearance of the peasant culture that he found instrumental for the renewal of the spirit of the Polish nation. The common image of the rural youth was "(...) the urbanity of culture which accommodates both those who leave the countryside and those who stay in it" (Chałasiński 1969b, 20). During one of his seminars, Chałasiński said that the rural environment was "empty" because, despite its civilizational and professional advancement, the peasant population lost its sense of mission to change the world for the better derived from the ideals of the pre-war agrarianism and the peasant movement (Łysiowa 1984, 63). In the late 1960s, he wrote that the rural population no longer had a recollection of "(...) the myth of peasant culture that permeated the young peasant movement 25 years before. At the same time, there is no dominant supreme idea that would constitute a common element for all ways of modeling oneself (...). There is no inclination for the apostolate — neither a religious nor secular one" (Chałasiński 1969b, 21).

The nationalization process in Poland, with the nationalization of the Polish peasantry as its primary aspect described by Chałasiński, ended after the Second World War. It took place when the said social class entered into the orbit of the national culture and its impact, assimilating its values and treating it as an integral part of its own identity. Upon the social advancement of the Polish countryside, a modern Polish mass nation was created. However, the latter happened at the expense of the peasant culture which, by accepting the intelligentsia-urban model, began to lose its own

specificity. The modernization and urbanization of the peasant countryside, both technical and cultural, caused a cultural disorganization of the rural environment, which was no longer able to influence the national culture and made it largely peasant. The emergence of a modern Polish mass nation coincided with the gradual disappearance of the peasant world from the Polish cultural landscape, further accelerated by the brutal — and in Chałasiński's opinion unfavorable for peasants — policy of the state authorities regarding the Polish countryside (Ważniewski 2019, 181). The promotion of the urban system of values, the collectivization of peasant agriculture, and the perception of the peasant culture as a reservoir of conservatism accelerated these processes (Bukraba-Rylska 2008, 362-364). Unfolding before Chałasiński's eyes, the process of nationalization came to an end. As a scholar and researcher, he was given an opportunity to document and describe it, and he proved to be a prolific writer and lecturer. Yet, his agrarianist dreams of a nation whose most important part would be the unique and valuable elements of the peasant culture did not come true.

Conclusions

Chałasiński's scientific output marks an important stage in the development of Polish sociology, with many of its representatives quite rightly recognizing him as their intellectual forefather. However, this does not mean that his work has never been criticized by other scholars interested in similar subjects. One of the most common and serious accusations is that of ignoring the economic and political factors that influence the formation of a nation. Some argue that Chałasiński essentially reduced the nation to cultural phenomena only. This would be an example of naïve culturalism, which assumes that a nation is a cultural phenomenon while culture is everything — a source of meanings, a system of communication, tradition, and language, a way of life, and a normative system. The nation as a cultural phenomenon embraces and permeates everything: from the norms regulating labor relations to the honor codes and the identity of individuals. Naïve culturalism offers nothing new but a banal statement that, as a result of historical processes in multinational empires, the stateless nations of Central and Eastern Europe were formed based on their cultural resources rather than the ideas of citizenship, as was the case of the political nations in Western Europe. Chałasiński and other naïve culturalists are said not to have noticed the civic nations at all. Critical voices are also raised with regard to recognizing the nationalization of peasants as a turning point. Those who object to this point of view say that the latter was an obvious consequence of the modernization processes of societies where peasants were also a dominant population.

It is my belief that these accusations are largely misplaced. A careful analysis of Chałasiński's works leads to the opposite conclusion. He wrote that nation as a community of culture was a phenomenon dependent on political and economic conditions (social background). As a political idea, it emerged at a specific moment in the history of Western Europe, spreading to the rest of the continent and ultimately the rest of the world. In its cradle, the idea of a nation became the foundation for the formation of political nations. Where ethnic communities did not have their own states, for example in the territory of what later became Poland, the idea of the nation was incorporated into the elite national culture that was then forming with the exclusion of peasants and which was later used by the intelligentsia to ensure their economic and political domination over the people. This shows that Chałasiński did not ignore the economic and political conditions but focused on the formation of the national culture integrating the national community in a specific historical and political-economic context. Therefore, the accusations of cultural reductionism seem to be not so much a result of a deep reflection on Chałasiński's work but a form of ritual criticism, typically unsubstantiated with an in-depth study of his writings. They may also be generated by the fact that he did not care about developing a universal and abstract theory of the genesis of a nation or proposing an exhaustive typology. Instead, he focused on describing the specific case of the formation of the Polish nation.

What Chałasiński can be accused of is his style of writing, frequently resembling journalism. At times, deviating far from scientific precision can leave readers guessing what the author actually meant by a certain phrase or statement. One may also have doubts about the teleological manner of his analyses, where the phenomena related to the formation of the nation are described as a deliberate and directional process of its egalitarianization and democratization. This is where the treatise of Chałasiński-scholar is disturbed by Chałasiński-agrarian, a committed peasant advocate interested in the emancipation and empowerment of the Polish peasantry. This is particularly visible in his discussion of the modern Polish nation, whose formation in his eyes appeared to be almost a historical disaster when his vision of the folk national culture was replaced by the reality of the intelligentsia-urban mass culture. The nationalization of Polish peasants ended due to the implementation of the modernization project of the Polish communist state, which, through its actions trying to reform the Polish countryside, contributed to a large extent to the destruction of traditional peasant culture and the exposure of peasants to the influence of the national culture of urban and intelligentsia provenance. This was the culture that the Polish countryside immersed in, becoming an integral part of the Polish nation. However, he did not notice how much of the rural or peasant values the national culture in Poland absorbed despite its evidently intellectual provenance. Paradoxically, this weakness of his sociology of a nation proved to be its greatest advantage.

Chałasiński described the nationalization of Polish peasants against the background of the formation of the Polish nation in an extremely erudite manner and exhaustive terms. Focused on analyzing the nationalization of a specific social group, the scholar had no interest in developing the sociology of a nation that would withstand the test of time and could be used to study the contemporary issues related to nations or the reality other than Polish and Central European. Chałasiński's observations regarding the continuing division into the culture of the urban intelligentsia/"lords" and the culture of the peasant/folk, despite the nationalization of the peasants, were confirmed in numerous sociological studies during the period of the Polish People's Republic (Szczepeński 1983, 547; Szafraniec 1991, 155). They have proven insightful in the period of systemic transformation, as they remain today (Szafraniec 2005; Słomczyński, Zarycki 2017, 199–123). The issues raised by Chałasiński, therefore, seem to be heuristically valuable. For some time now, the Polish social sciences have witnessed a "folk turn" that consists of describing the history of the country in ways that highlight the perspective of the folk classes, including the peasants. It is significant, however, that most researchers associated with this trend do not refer to Chałasiński at all. Two of the more important works of this kind are: Adam Leszczyński's "Ludowa historia Polski" (A people's history of Poland) (2020) and Kacper Pobłocki's "Chamstwo" (The Rabble) (2021). The folk turn in Polish social sciences does not refer to Chałasiński's culturalist theory, but rather to Marxist economic history and the Marxist theory of class rule, even if it is not expressed directly (Błoński 2022). Sadly, Chałasiński is treated as a classic but dusty scholar by many in contemporary Polish sociology: everyone has heard of him, but little has been read about him.

Chałasiński wrote almost exclusively in Polish. On the one hand, this approach corresponded with his views on sociology, whose role was to support social engineering and provide tools for the Polish countryside to improve the well-being of Polish peasants. On the other hand, it limited the number of his readers and made his works practically unknown to other sociologists in the world. It is my belief and conviction that they are worth presenting for their cognitive values. They can offer sociologists and historians an additional insight into the evolution of the peasantry in Poland or, more broadly, Central and Eastern Europe, where the transformation processes took a slightly different turn than in the West of Europe or other parts of the world.

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